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12-2-1999

Interview with Anthony Deluliis

Anthony Deluliis

Kate Hitchcock

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Recommended Citation

Deluliis, Anthony and Hitchcock, Kate, "Interview with Anthony Deluliis" (1999). *Interviews*. 4.
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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Accession Number: AE-KH-A120299

Researcher's Name: Kate Hitchcock

Event: Interview with Anthony DeIuliis, Principal Fredricktown High School

Place: Fredricktown High School

Date: December 2, 1999

K: Just to start off with some basic biographical information of how you came here and how you came to this job.

A: I was an Assistant Principal of a high school in Moral County and also Principal of a Junior High in Moral County in the Highland District for seven years before I came to _____. I'm in my seventh year here. I'm a veteran of 24 years of education, two years teaching at the college level, about 6-7 years in the classroom, a year as a Guidance Counselor, I've had extensive experience as an Administrator, Athletic Administrator, and I've had Administrative experiences over seas. I just came to Central Ohio for my last educational pursuit in _____. I'm originally from Cleveland. I've been all around the state.

K: What do you see as the purpose of the Alternative School?

A: In my opinion the purpose of the Alternative School is to give us another option of some sort of consequence for students who are not having a successful school experience in a traditional school. Sometimes it's more of a consequence type of sentence. Sometimes, depending on the student, he or she really needs more individualized attention. It does not fall under a special Ed standard for whatever reason and occasionally has to go to alternative school settings so that they can still receive some degree of credit because usually they are not working out very well in a traditional school setting.

K: If you were to compare the Alternative center with their home school, with their school, what do you see that they are missing?

A: Well they are definitely missing the social contact with all of their peers. There are a number of students there so they still have contact socially but in terms of seeing a wide variety of types of people, we're probably not seeing that at the Alternative School. In terms of other things, obviously, I believe that the amount of academics that can be offered there, I think, at least right now, is somewhat limited. It's better than it has been but it is limited. We also have to understand the reason these people are placed in the Alternative School is to give them a shot at getting some credit, getting some education. Because of where they were going under the current system that they were going to they weren't receiving an adequate education for whatever reason. Either there were family problems or they were having behavioral problems or there were outside factors of some sort that were stopping them from being successful here. Usually it goes a little bit beyond that. In my case, I will send a student to the Alternative when they are also violating the rights of other students' education because that's kind of a key indicator in what I do.

K: In terms of your spectrum of discipline here at the school, what does it take, or what is the formal process for them to go to the Alternative Center?

A: That's really hard to say. We have a conduct code that really is fairly complete but allows me some latitude to decide based on the situation. I've worked in a school system that had a very, very, hard and fast standard code where they had a definite. Like your going to receive three detentions for this and your going to receive a suspension for this. There were no gray areas or at least they didn't think there wasn't any gray in the system. We found that even working within that system there were a lot of gray areas. Even under that system it was hard to say that everybody got exactly the same thing. There are situations where I will suspend a student out of school regardless because of their activity.

K: That's not even putting them in the Alternative Center?

A: That's right! I won't even use the Alternative School because I need to show that is a punishment and they are going to loose academic credit. The Academic School is not had that loss of academic credits. Although they're being pulled out of the social group they don't loose that credit. Not if they're sharp. They still have to keep their own work. If your suspended out of school you loose the credit for the material that you've missed on the days that you are out. If a student is involved a sufficient enough fight and really gross disrespect to a faculty member I will suspend them. I don't use the Alternative School that much. In fact, if you were to check through the records I probably have not, myself, assigned students there much. Many of our students that are assigned are assigned through the courts. I'm not saying that I wouldn't have but it's just usually that we both come to an agreement at a given time that they need to go to the Alternative School because of some things that either happened here or on the outside. But no nail down a specific offense that automatically sends a kid to the Alternative School, I can't do that.

K: Why is it that you don't use the Alternative School as frequently as maybe some other high school?

A: Well for one thing, logistically it's hard to get materials down to them. I think they are making some pretty good strides so that we can fax things to them. I believe they're going to get a fax machine so materials can be more easily gotten to the administrators and teachers down at the Alternative School. You cannot depend on a student to get his or her work. Sometimes when you assign a student to the Alternative School, at least the way they used to do it, they expected the school to get the work. To me it seemed like my teachers and myself were being punished more than the students themselves. We'd have to go around and get the persons work, take them out to the bus and make sure they got on the bus. That got a little old. I will assign a student to the Alternative School but I do it infrequently. When I feel that I need an additional step between We have an in school suspension and a Saturday suspension here. If a student has already gone up my discipline ladder where he has exhausted his in school detention privileges or Saturday detentions then if he hasn't done something strong enough to warrant a suspension I will usually send them to Alternative School. That's an additional step. That's what I like. The fact that I have an additional possible consequence for that type of student. On occasion if I have a tremendous truancy problem and I'm upset with their grades and their attendance and I take them to court. If court and I both agree the student needs to go to the alternative school and that's where a lot of our

students have come from. It's kind of been a joint school/court agreement. Usually that's where they come from. I rarely send students there. I have one there this week but that's because he had pretty much exhausted his in school detention privileges and he has a Saturday job and he will accept Saturday school so I basically said, "okay, you leave me no other options. Your offense was not severe enough to warrant suspension but your going to have to go to Alternative School. Each time your going to go to Alternative School until my opinion, that has been worn out and if your not responding because lets face it why should we even be talking if your acting properly and not getting into trouble with teachers and being disrespectful and violating the rules we shouldn't even be here. I don't have a set number of times that I'll send them to Alternative School but if I feel it's not being successful then I'm going to start putting them out.

K: Can you elaborate a little more on your discipline ladder? Scales of what you tolerate and then the next level.

A: Part of it is set up in our conduct code. It gives the type of misbehavior and what is recommended for first, second, and third offense. Those are recommendations. This is the bracket of things that I can work within. Lots of times, lets take a situation where if I've had a student that starts out the school year kind of rocky and they get two or three detentions and they don't show up for the detentions I double the detentions. Which is what I usually do if they don't show up the first time. They don't serve those so I'll put them in ISD because I don't want to send them out of school and ISD kind of like a tank situation where the kids will bring their work and they sit in isolation and do their work. It's kind of boring but they get their work done and that doesn't hurt them. I only allow them two of those per year because if they end up in there more than twice my faculty feels that it's really not working and that they need to go up the ladder. Then I start pulling them in for Saturday Schools. If they don't attend they either go to Alternative or I'm going to suspend them because it's insubordination. There's a ladder of thing that I will go through but to start over again if I've had a student who starts out the year kind of rocky and he may have gotten 2-3 detentions and then he's worked into an ISD and then for 4-5 months he's fine. Then in the springtime he or she gets a little rowdy and all of a sudden I'm facing the same thing. Where do I start on that ladder? I got a lot of arguments about that. In my opinion I start back in the beginning because I've had 4-5 months of really good behavior from this student. I'm not going to start where he or she was in Sept./Oct. in March if he hasn't had any problems. I just go back to the beginning of the ladder. If I have a student who is like clockwork, once or twice a week I have that student in my office and it just seems like things aren't working we go up the ladder kind of quick. The intent is, at least in my opinion; to increase the severity of the consequence until they start to see that this isn't working out or this isn't good for me. Sometimes they don't. If they don't, by that time they have usually created enough of a disruption in school so that I can say this isn't working out to the parents. He or she is not being successful here we need to look at an Alternative School setting or I'm going to look at a suspension. My discipline ladder on the suspension is 3-5-10 and then your gone and you don't come back. I've never had that. In seven years I never sent someone out on an expulsion based on the ladder. I think I've gotten to 10 with one student in seven years. Right now I think I'm at five with another students. It's worked pretty well. Most students realize they have to tighten up on their behavior a little bit.

K: So you see suspension after the Alternative Center?

A: Oh yeah.

K: But if they were expelled they would be sent to the Alternative Center?

A: Yes, they have to be. Judge ____ has talked to us about the fact that_ In fact, he would prefer that if a student is on out of school suspension they be sent to the Alternative School. I personally think that if I send them to the Alternative School by its very nature I have them make up the work. Our suspension code says they will receive a "0" for their work. I understand his point of not wanting him on the street, we want him in the Alternative school and might be able to work that out but I haven't really had that instances of it. Probably not more than one or two a year. Those students who have been on long suspensions, I mean, I don't give huge, long term, and I know some Principals do sometimes, but sometimes if it's for a fight it's an automatic three. I'm not sure that's enough to be sent to Alternative School for. Five day suspension possibly because it's an all week thing and unless a parent is there with that student the kids going to be out roaming the streets and probably going to get into more trouble.

K: So they are not expected to do the work that they've missed?

A: Oh yes. We ask them to do the work so they can keep up with the class.

K: So the work does go home with them on suspension?

A: I'm not going to go and get the work for them. I tell them, "you can get your work, you can do the work for that teacher, you can keep up with that class but you will receive no credit. I also allow them, if they are doing projects, projects don't hold to that. In other words, if you have a long term project and you're suspended for five days in the middle of that project you can still turn that project in. That would be like a death sentence and we don't do that.

K: Do you see any similarities or common characteristics in those that do get in a lot of trouble?

A: I think there are some similarities in terms of many of them have difficulty accepting direction. They usually have very poor work skills. For the most part many of them have maturity problems. Maturity problems, work skills, and a problem with accepting direction or authority, those are probably the one's I see the most because that's usually what lands them in the trouble that gets into Alternative School. If we have a student that has severe enough behavioral problems to where that's happening a lot, occasionally we will ask our Psychologist to test for severe behavioral handicap. Normally, by the time they reach high school they are already pretty well tested for that. We know who is an SPH type student and who is not. We have tried and been successful with a couple of SPH students of bringing them back into the general population and putting them on behavioral plans. We say to them, okay if you can keep your behavior at this level we'll let you come back to regular population and sign up for regular courses. If we don't have any problems with behavior in this much amount of time then we'll take you off the probationary period and just make you a regular student. We have had a couple of kid's do that successfully and fortunately we've also had probably double that haven't been successful. They just can't seem to deal with coming back into the general population and they still have a lot of issues.

K: What do you see as the primary force behind the student's misconduct? Whether it be family, demographic, other students egging them on or _

A: That's a tough one. I don't know. I know that in a variety of situations I have seen family problems. There have also been situations that I'm also aware of where I thought the family was really rather strong and the kids were acting out in terms of a problem they had with a dad or a mom maybe being too strong and reacting to that. Honestly, family problems. I think that also by the time the kids reach this age they know who the kids are in their class and who's buttons they can push. If they know they can push those buttons they will do that. I three kids that were SPH kids who are back here know and everybody knows that they were in SPH and they know they have a hot button. We have one student who really reacts to a particular kind of taunting and if you want to make this kid go off it only takes one or two comments and he's going to go off like clock work. On occasion it's not just family sometimes it's a psychological situation perhaps but I'd say for the most part family.

K: How effective do you think the Alternative School is in its discipline?

A: I don't know. I haven't sent that many students there. I will say that the one's that I have sent there have been in a situations where they have already been in trouble with a course and I think they felt more at home there and wanted to go there more than stay there. Now the student I have there this week, I'm going to be real interested in how he feels when he comes back. I'm real curious to see how he reacts. I don't want to go back there or that was pretty cool I'd like to go back. I'm going to find out. In the last two years I think we've had three or four students there long term because of the court. I can only think of one of the four that really wanted to be here rather than there.

K: Why do you think that is?

A: I don't know if it was because they felt more akin to the people that were there or because there was more one on one with their instructors. I know they had computers there and maybe they felt better about simply working with a computer. In particular, Karol, I've toured the place but I haven't toured it the last year and a month. I can't really say that my information is based on that. I don't know too much more than that.

K: When you send a student or one is sent through the courts what type of information is shared about that student?

A: If the court asks for information we are obliged by law to give it and usually the parent signs a release to that effect. When they send the student to Alternative School they have a somewhat elaborate system of sign offs. That student has access to counseling which I'm really happy about. Many of them need good strong counseling and they put some things into place that I think, the counseling is one of the more valuable things they can be given there. As far as what I do, I contact the parent by phone or in person. I have them come in and I talk about the need for the Alternative School. I go through the other options that are available to them. I tell them they don't have to accept Alternative School and that we could put him in Saturday school for a series of

weekends or you can accept an out of school suspension. Usually by the time they're at Alternative school they're up the ladder and there are no lower options available to them. I make a phone call to the Alternative School Principal and ask if there are seats available and when would be a decent time for the parent to come down to bring his or her child down. That's about it. I usually try to allow enough time if possible so that student can get his or assignments from their teachers. I make sure they are aware of that's their responsibility. I'm not going around to get it for them. I also call the bus coordinator and make sure that they know there's going to be a student riding our career center bus that transports our career center kids and also our special Ed students. They do two or three drop offs and they'll take my Alternative school kids down.

K: Do you perceive that students who go to the Alternative Center and then returned to the school that they are treated any differently by either their teachers or their peers? Are they labeled such as the SPH student is?

A: No. I don't foresee that but I have to be honest with you. Again, the student that went there this week is only the second student in a year, since the beginning of last school year, that has only gone there for a week or two. The court has sent everyone else for the remainder of the school year so there hasn't been a return. It's a little bit hard for me to say.

K: What do you see as constituting a success if they are sent to the Alternative School? Just not going back or_

A: Not just not going back but a reduction in the amount of acting out behaviors that cause problems with coming into conflict with our conduct code and our rules. They are simple things like you respect others, you respect your teachers, you do your work, and you mind your own business. //

K: From what I've seen of the Alternative Center I see it as kind of an attempt to balance both the discipline of the student as well as the education. Do you see that one over shadows the other or wins out in the end?

A: Again I have to be honest with you. I think that obviously, in my opinion, the intent of the Alternative School is a touch more disciplinary than education. It was set up as an Alternative school not because they teach some sort of totally different curriculum, it was because the kids could not get along in their current school and were running into disciplinary type problems. I think it is more of a disciplinary school but I do think on the positive side that when it started out with a discipline way up here and curriculum way down here that the scales actually balanced out a little bit. Maybe it's more like this now that the curriculum has come up and that they are making much more of an effort to be a true school and not just a holding place that happens to have some education materials on hand. }

K: Have you noticed any recent changes in Alternative? You said you hadn't been there in over year.

A: I haven't been there in about a year and a month. I've talked to Mr. Marshall who is the new Director. He's told me that they're making some strides to get him a fax machine and he's going to

be on First Class, which is our school/county e-mail system. I know that Mr. Richardson has made an attempt to get more computers and more materials for the kids. When it comes right down to it and I know they've gotten more instructors simply because of the need but when it comes down to it the amount of money and effort put into keeping such an institution going is an indicator of how important the community that is. Since we are really one of the few communities with a long standing_ Our Alternative School has been existence for probably at least five years. I don't think that there are too many Alternative Schools set up throughout the state. Ours was one of the first ones so it's obvious that our community thinks that's important and they've put the money and resources toward it. You can talk about it but unless your going to put the money and resources to it it's just talk. I think they've gone beyond talk. I think they think it's very important and I agree. It's nice to have an alternative possibility for some of these kids but I wish it were little bit more successful. I don't think it's necessarily the fault of the people at the alternative school or the county superintendent or the counselors or whatever else. To some of the extent some of the responsibility still has to go on the shoulders of the students that are there. They have to realize, hey, look at my life. I'm not being real successful. I'm having problems at home, I'm having problems at school and now I'm in Alternative School, what's wrong with this picture and what am I doing wrong? What I see a lot of is people point fingers and saying, "well your wrong, and your wrong, and your wrong" but they don't look at why they are in all this trouble. I mean the school has 400 students and they're only three or four of us here.

K: So personal accountability?

A: Yes.

K: You named a few things but what other suggestions would you have about the things that you think could be changed at the school for the better? Or how would you make these students more personally accountable?

A: I don't know. I know a lot of them are already on probation and they are held accountable by their probation officers in terms of how they function in class and what they do in their grades. In terms of other things I say their accountability deals with what kind of credit they get form their courses and how long they stay at the Alternative School. To some extent that's. I'm hoping that the student that I sent this week doesn't want to go back. I hope he alters his behavior to the point where we never even get into a conversation about that possibility. I don't know if he's ever going to accept or take personal responsibility for his behavior and his actions. I wish I could find an answer to that. Maybe I could peddle that and make a lot of money.

K: Do you have any practical solutions for the school?

A: I think you get tied up on a lot of different things. They have limits as to their site and where they are located. I think it would be a lot easier if they were on a slightly different site. In some ways, in terms of space and in terms of layout of the facility but on the other hand they're right across the street or in some cases right above or below the probation officers which is very good. There are some good things and some bad things. Obviously you would want enough money to have up to date computers and software and plenty of materials. You want to have a low teacher/student ratio. I don't know where the ratios are right now. I can't come up with anything in

terms of solution. I'm not saying I'm dissatisfied with the Alternative School because I'm not and I'm not saying that I could come up with anything better so I'm not going to be critical. Right now, given what they have I think they're doing very well.

K: Is there anything you'd like to add?

A: Other than I think the community_ I'm impressed with the fact that the community and the people in the community have enough foresight to see that this is a good thing and that they continue to put some effort into this. I would like to see maybe what we do here on occasions, we do an exit survey of seniors every so many years to show what they thought was good and what they thought was bad. Were they really prepared or they didn't think their preparation was that good for college or for life. Would there be anything wrong with, and I realize that the kind of kid that goes to Alternative School probably not give you a lot of survey's back but anything is better than nothing. Would they be able to tell anybody a few years down the road did the Alternative School help me change my life and put me on the right path? What types of things were good or bad? What's wrong with an exit survey to maybe show them where they could do a little bit more? You're asking a Principal who hasn't been there in a year. The kids who are there and it's not always a good thing to ask while they are there but they had to be able to come out just like we realize with seniors. On the senior exit survey, when they are just graduating is terrible because they're really at the height of their rebelliousness or they're really worried about college and they are not going to give you real good results on that. Sometimes you have to wait on that until they can put things into perspective and say, "you know, school did teach me this and this and this" and they're kind of over some of the petty things that happen in high school. That's probably what would have to happen with Alternative School. I think you have to wait a little bit and then ask those people whether Alternative School really helped them.

K: Are there any questions you have for me?

A: Well, what's the scope of the project in terms of what kinds of things are you doing? Are you doing other Alternative Schools? Are you just focusing on this one?

K: I'm just focusing on this one mainly. I'm trying to get how this whole program runs with everyone involved because there are so many different people involved. This school is very different than other options in other states. I am from NJ and we don't have one that is in lieu of suspension or other time expulsions. I am interested in that aspect. A big part of this project for me is assessment in terms of options for reform, or suggestions, or what's good about it. I also have looked at other Alternative Centers and hoped to do site visits at one or two of them just to have some type of comparison. I'm also doing more paper research on that type of think because the scope of this is rather large. It is a yearlong project but it's culminating into a very large paper.

A: Have you spoken to Judge Ron?

K: Yes.

K: Do you have any other suggestions of people I should talk to?

A: There was another person. I think he's in the community but he's no longer attached to the County school system but his name is Bruce Hawkins.

K: I spoke to him two nights ago. He had the entire history of how the school_

A: Mr. Hawkins and Judge Ron kind of put their heads together and put this thing together. They were kind of like the brainchildren of it I guess. I know that you got a lot of positive ink in papers, not just around here but throughout the state because we weren't the first one but one of the initial ones. There are positives and negatives to it and I think they need to fine tune it based on every community.

Side two leads in_

A: _ some areas in New Jersey where the kind of system that we are advocating just probably wouldn't work. You would probably actually be creating a problem to bring some of these folks together the way we brought them together at the Alternative School.

K: Right.

A: I know in Cleveland I went to a big city school and have experience in big city schools in Toledo. That type of a format in an urban area I'm not sure would work but it works here or at least it's working here. Your probably going to be better versed to tell me how well it's working more than most but at least it gives me an option and I'm grateful for that.

K: Thank you so much.

(End of Interview)